

ANNUAL STATE PLAN

**FISCAL YEAR 2014
FEDERAL ALLOCATION
\$85,900,000**

WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN NUTRITION PROGRAM (WIC)

The Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program is a federal program supplemented by state funding which serves low and moderate income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and young children certified as medically or nutritionally at risk. A network of 35 local programs with 119 sites and over 1,000 retail stores in communities across the Commonwealth supports WIC activities.

Funded Services:

- Nutrition education and counseling
- Breastfeeding education and support
- Dietary assessment and certification for program benefits
- Information and referral to, and coordination with, other health & social service programs
- Childhood immunization assessment and follow up
- Checks for nutritious foods
- Farmers' Market coupons for fresh produce

WIC works in collaboration with community health care providers and other local health and human service agencies to provide coordinated, comprehensive services to families in need. Through carrying out its mandates, participation in WIC reduces infant mortality and morbidity and improves participant health outcomes.

The Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program functions as a major service component within the Nutrition Division of the Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition (BFHN), Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EHS). As such, WIC services are responsive to family & community needs, sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences, and oriented to the prevention of health problems and the improvement of health outcomes. In addition to direct collaboration with the other nutrition programs in the Nutrition Division--Growth and Nutrition, PKU Support, and the Office of Nutrition--WIC works directly with the other maternal and child health programs in the BFHN. Particularly, WIC coordinates with program services in the Division of Perinatal, Early Childhood, & Special Health Care Needs, including Early Intervention Partnerships and programs in the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention, including those in its Divisions of Primary Care & Health Access and Violence & Injury Prevention, as well as with its Prevention and Wellness Division on obesity and physical activity initiatives.

WIC also coordinates activities on issues affecting women and children with other DPH Bureaus and offices: — Substance Abuse Services, Tobacco Control, HIV/AIDS, Healthy Communities, and Health Equity, as well as with Immunization and Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention. Strong intra-agency networking and lateral communication with other DPH programs and

committees on key initiatives—such as infant mortality, safe sleep, parenting support, obesity and wellness—ensure integrated policy and program development, planning and implementation.

Quality nutrition services focusing on individual service needs form the centerpiece of the Program. The WIC Program stresses the importance of good nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood for optimal growth and development. Particular emphasis is placed on providing services to high-risk populations, including prenatal and breastfeeding women, medically or nutritionally at risk infants and children, members of ethnic minority groups, new immigrants, and pregnant adolescents.

WIC's participant focus is buttressed by the state office's involvement with the multifaceted Massachusetts WIC community—local agency and program staff, WIC Advisory Council, WIC Vendor Advisory Council and Medical Board members, authorized stores, participants, and advocates—in identifying problems, developing solutions and affecting program improvement. WIC also maintains a web-based computer software system that produces and accounts for approximately 500,000 food checks a month—with personal computers at local programs—and a banking services contract to process and reconcile these checks. Federal regulations and monitoring and evaluation requirements are critical components of WIC Program operations.

State and federal dollars provide funding for contracted WIC services in the community to serve the 2014 statewide monthly caseload assignment of 133,050. Local program attainment of service levels beyond this level depends on intensified outreach activities, increased productivity, staff, space, and computer equipment capacity as well as economic conditions.

The rate of inflation in WIC food costs, the levels of federal and supplemental state funding, and the infant formula rebate continue to be the critical determinants of the number of participants WIC is able to serve.

Through strong support of its WIC Program, Massachusetts is in the forefront of providing basic nutritional assistance to needy children. Following a 1983 DPH study of nutritional status of low-income children, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to provide supplemental funds to WIC; six other states are currently following this example. In 1993, Massachusetts enacted The Childhood Hunger Relief Act—landmark legislation that provides for full funding to guarantee that all eligible infants, children and pregnant and postpartum women may participate in WIC. Full funding makes Massachusetts the first state in the nation to ensure WIC services to 85% of all individuals estimated as eligible by the Massachusetts WIC Needs Assessment.

Priorities:

Massachusetts WIC seeks to increase the understanding of the importance of nutrition and its impact on health and well-being and highlight the program's positive influence on the development of infants and children. The Program continues to work within its outcome-oriented strategic plan, the objective of which is to ensure sustained support from community members, the legislature, providers, and participants through providing quality, participant-centered, culturally and linguistically appropriate nutrition services. Multifaceted activities will continue to promote WIC Participant access to services, quality of service, infrastructure, and management as follows:

- Identify opportunities to add value to program services so that participants continue to receive WIC benefits throughout their full period of eligibility.
- Continue to shape WIC's image as an authority in maternal child nutrition through writing magazine articles, providing nutrition messages on the radio, and using social media.
- Improve collaboration and consistency between WIC and the health care provider community in promoting breastfeeding.
- Continue development, testing and integration of the WIC Card, an electronic benefits system for the WIC IT system.
- Begin preparing participants and vendors in anticipation of the rollout of the WIC Card.
- Continue to support the Fit WIC initiative to promote physical activity as an integral component of WIC nutrition services.
- Continue the WIC performance contracting system which focuses on program management and service quality at local programs by emphasizing health and management outcome measures.
- Deliver nutrition services using participant centered counseling techniques to improve communication and understanding.
- Continue to monitor and promote participant purchases of the new WIC foods especially fruits and vegetables.
- Monitor program performance emphasizing quality and excellent participant services as integral components of WIC nutrition services.
- Continue to monitor extended WIC office hours to ensure access for working families.
- Provide opportunities to support open communication with local agencies to enhance performance and satisfaction.
- Continue social marketing and other public awareness efforts throughout the Commonwealth to support outreach activities.
- Use social media to enhance and support outreach activities and maximize program participation. Continually update and enhance the WIC pages on the DPH Website including blogs and tweets on pertinent maternal child health topics.
- Continue to strengthen coordination of WIC participant services at the community level with healthcare clinicians and managed care plans, MassHealth/Medicaid, Head Start, programs in the Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition, the Growth & Nutrition clinics, other maternal and

child health services, and other state agencies.

- Continue working relationships and communication with the WIC retail store vendor community and enhance vendor management systems.
- Provide retail store vendors with the tools to improve their capability to train staff to ensure a positive shopping experience.
- Ensure standard application of policies and procedures through timely standardized training of all new WIC staff and opportunities of ongoing training for all staff at The WIC Learning Center.
- Continue to support the Massachusetts Immunization Program goal of age-appropriate immunization of WIC infants and children through ongoing collaboration with the Program and other immunization projects.
- Continue breastfeeding promotion and support activities to increase breastfeeding rates among WIC participants.
- Coordinate on data sharing to improve outreach and referrals between WIC, and Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition, other maternal and child health programs, the MassHealth/Medicaid Program, SNAP, and school meals programs.